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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 000348

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DEPT FOR AF/S S. HILL

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TAGS: PREL KDEM ZI SF

SUBJECT: MDC TREASURER BENNETT SAYS PARTY WILL "SHOCK THE  
WORLD" IN UPCOMING ELECTIONS

REF: A. HARARE 130

1B. 07 PRETORIA 3875

1C. 07 PRETORIA 3486

PRETORIA 00000348 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Treasurer Roy Bennett claimed that support for the MDC is growing and that the party will "shock the world" in the March 29 presidential and parliamentary elections. Bennett says he has raised "significant" funds for the party in recent weeks, most from Zimbabweans living in exile, and is providing resources to each MDC candidate. The presidential candidacy of former ZANU-PF Minister Simba Makoni (ref A) has generated excitement among the "chattering class" in Harare, but Makoni lacks grassroots support, Bennett suggested. Tsvangirai is open to an alliance with Makoni, but only with

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Tsvangirai at the head. Bennett is concerned that Secretary

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General Tendai Biti, discredited by his role in the SADC talks, might defect to Makoni's camp. On the failed MDC coalition talks, Bennett said that the leadership was willing to make compromises, but the Mutambara faction "pushed too far" and the MDC membership rejected the proposed deal. END SUMMARY.

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"World Will be Shocked"  
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12. (C) A visibly upbeat MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett told PolOff February 19 in Johannesburg that he has "no doubt" that the MDC will win the upcoming March 29 elections in Zimbabwe. "We will shock the world," Bennett proclaimed. The exiled Bennett said the MDC is picking up significant support in rural areas throughout the country. Not since 2000 has he seen such excitement on the ground. "The people want Mugabe gone" and know that the MDC is the "party of change."

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Fundraising Success  
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13. (C) Bennett says he has raised "significant" funds in the past few weeks for the MDC electoral campaigns, largely from Zimbabweans living in exile (NFI). He is providing each MDC parliamentary candidate USD 1,000 for their campaign, with a USD 5,000 "constituency fund" if they win their seat. Similarly, he is giving local councilor candidates USD 100, with USD 500 for victors. He has also set aside funds for the presidential campaign. This is the most resources the MDC has ever had to contest elections, Bennett said, which will greatly help them get their message out. (COMMENT: Bennett did not reveal the total amount of money he has raised and added that only he knows how much the MDC has. END COMMENT)

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Makoni No Grassroots Support  
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14. (C) According to Bennett, Simba Makoni has very limited grassroots support. The "chattering classes" in Harare and Johannesburg are excited about Makoni, but not the Zimbabwean people, who do not trust him. The "Makoni project" is nothing more than an attempt by some in ZANU-PF to seize the party from Mugabe. Makoni does not represent fundamental change, simply a continuity of ZANU-PF corruption and misrule.

15. (C) On the prospects for an alliance between the MDC and Makoni, Bennett says that Tsvangirai would never accept a position second to Makoni. Tsvangirai is open to an alliance, but Makoni would need to treat him with respect and "bring something to the table," such as the support of the military. Makoni has not reached out to Tsvangirai directly, although he has sent several envoys to Tsvangirai to urge him to support Makoni. Most recently, former ZANU-PF Minister Dumiso Dabengwa met with Tsvangirai February 18 in Johannesburg, the first time the two had met. Dabengwa strongly encouraged Tsvangirai to support Makoni. However, as the two spoke, Bennett said it became clear that Makoni and Solomon Mujuru had not been honest with Dabengwa about previous contacts with Tsvangirai. Dabengwa and Tsvangirai

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agreed to meet again in the near future.

16. (C) Bennett is concerned that MDC Secretary General Tendai Biti may "defect" to the Makoni camp. Biti has been "thoroughly discredited" within the party due to his role in the failed SADC facilitation talks. Biti's personal relationship with Bennett and Tsvangirai has broken down, although Deputy Treasurer Elton Mangoma and Spokesman Nelson Chamisa remain close to Biti and are trying to keep him in the party.

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Failure to Unite MDC  
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17. (C) Bennett acknowledged that the failure to form a coalition with the Mutambara faction of the MDC was unfortunate. The Swedish Olof Palme Foundation and the Dutch Institute for Multiparty Democracy both "put money on the table" for the parties if they reunited, creating a strong incentive to make a deal. Tsvangirai and the MDC leadership were prepared to make tough compromises, but the Mutambara-led MDC faction "pushed too far" in demanding nearly all the parliamentary seats in Matabeleland. When Tsvangirai went to the party membership with the proposed

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deal, they overwhelmingly rejected it. There was no possibility that Tsvangirai could have swayed them or overturned their decision.

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Comment

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18. (C) Bennett was as upbeat as we've seen him since he arrived in South Africa two years ago, buoyed perhaps by his recent fundraising success. Bennett has slowly built ties with key exiled Zimbabwean businessmen in South Africa, such as Strive Masiyiwa, Wellington Chadahumbe, and Isaac Takawira, an important and long-overdue step. The Masiyiwa-led group of exiles appears to be siding with Tsvangirai, not Makoni, in the upcoming election, although

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other South African-based exiles such as Trevor Ncube are clearly backing Makoni. We defer to Embassy Harare on Bennett's claim that the MDC is poised to "shock the world" in the upcoming election, a claim that strikes us as optimistic.

19. (C) HARARE COMMENT: On 18 February, Tsvangirai told Ambassador McGee that the MDC was strapped for money and was having difficulty buying election necessities such as fuel. When asked what the MDC would do for financial assistance, Tsvangirai said they would appeal for private donations, but

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that he was concerned. It is unclear if Tsvangirai was looking for more money or if Bennett exaggerated how much he has raised or not told Tsvangirai how successful he has been.

END HARARE COMMENT.

BOST